

side of the lake. *P. giganteus* does not occur anywhere else in the desert. The vegetation near the lake is so dense that it gives the impression of a forest. I regularly heard a peculiar note "weet tew", which I traced to an Indian Pitta (*Pitta brachyura*) that was sitting on the canopy of *Terminalia arjuna*. According to Ali and Ripley (1983) and Grimmett *et al.* (1998), the distribution of Indian Pitta excludes the western parts of Rajasthan. There is no past sighting of this bird by earlier bird watchers (Whistler 1938; Bohra and Goyal 1992; Rahmani 1996, 1997; Mukherjee 1995) in the desert. Besides the Indian Pitta, some birds, like the Yellow-legged Green-Pigeon (*Treron phoenicoptera*), Coppersmith barbet (*Megalaima haemacephala*) and Asian Koel (*Eudynamis scolopacea*) which were rare here, are now commonly seen on trees with large crown cover. The call of the Indian Pitta is

easily heard in the garden of Balsamand.

It appears that these birds have made Balsamand their home now that the catchments of the lake have improved in recent years. The lake no longer dries up as it used to. This perennial source of water also maintains the soil water regime at a higher level by continuous seepage, which keeps the *Ficus* fruiting all year round. It is possible that superior foliage and good food supply has resulted in the influx, from the Aravallis, of some birds that inhabit dense thickets.

May 15, 2002

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17. COMMON STARLING *STURNUS VULGARIS* IN ARUNACHAL PRADESH, INDIA

On November 8, 1999 in Sarli, a mountain village (c. 28° 1' N, 93° 9' E) located close to the Great Himalayan Range and along the Indo-Chinese border in the Lower Subansiri district of Arunachal Pradesh, I came across a man carrying a bird he had killed. On examination of the bird, I realised that it was a Common Starling *Sturnus vulgaris* (in winter plumage), which is unknown from this region. *S. vulgaris* breeds across the Palaearctic and is an abundant winter visitor to Pakistan and northern India (Ali and Ripley 1983; Roberts 1992). An uncommon winter visitor to Nepal and further east in Bhutan, Bangladesh, northeast India and Myanmar reported vagrant (Inskipp and Inskipp 1985; Smythies 1986; Harvey 1990; Ali *et al.* 1996; Grimmett *et al.* 1996).

This is the first record of the species from the state and

is possibly a vagrant. The man said that the bird had been feeding on the ground, along with two others, in a small clearing at 1,500 m just outside the village. I took the bird from him and preserved the skin.

Morphometrics (mm): Bill length - 29, wing - 125, tail - 65, tarsus - 28

Colour of bare parts: Iris - dark brown, Bill - dirty black, Legs and feet - brownish-red, claws - dark brown.

January 14, 2002

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